

Lesson One Primary Source

Callan, Louise. Philippine Duchesne: Frontier Missionary of the Sacred Heart. Maryland: Newman, 1957. Print.

Eleven years had passed since she had first revealed to Mother Barat her inspiration to sacrifice all for the sake of souls in some distant corner of the world. During those years she had done invaluable service for the Society. She had proved her worth, her loyalty, her fidelity to trust. She was one of the group to whom Saint Madeleine Sophie gave her confidence in matters of gravest import to the order. And the influence of the saint had been at work in her soul, softening the rugged energy of her character, curbing the vehement impulses that shook her whole being, guiding, restraining, helping her to cooperate with divine grace and so become a fit instrument for whatever work God had in store for her. To her pleading to be off on the enterprise beyond the seas Mother Barat always answered: "Wait and pray. Later, perhaps, we may think of it. It is out of the question now."

So matters stood [Mother Barat related in after years], when on January 14, 1817, [a Tuesday afternoon, just five days after Philippine had written her cautious note to her sister], Monseigneur Du Bourg, Bishop of Louisiana, arrived from America and had the kindness to call on me. Mother Duchesne knew of the visit, for she was acting as portress just when he arrived. When she came to tell me he was there, she implored me not to let such an opportunity slip. God's hour had come, she assured me, and I had only to say the word. I did not let her see that I shared her conviction, but only answered that if the Bishop brought up the subject, I might discuss it, but that I should want a year or eighteen months to prepare.

On the following day the Bishop offered Mass in our chapel and I sat and talked with him while he took his breakfast. He told me he wanted to establish religious orders in his vast diocese and was eager to have the religious of the Sacred Heart there. As he urged me to consent to this, I said to myself, "Things are certainly looking well for Mother Duchesne." To him I replied that if the plan were feasible, I should have someone quite ready for the work. Then I told him about Mother Duchesne and her vocation.

Monseigneur Du Bourg was delighted and asked to meet this future member of his diocese. When she came in, she threw herself on her knees for his blessing. It is easy to imagine her joy, and the rapturous way she showed it, and the gratitude she poured out in prayer to her divine Master.

Monseigneur Du Bourg continued his European tour in search of missionaries and financial aid for his diocese. In May he was in Paris again. To his dismay he learned that opposition was being raised by people who had a right to advise the Mother General. Although Father Varin had allowed Philippine to make a vow to devote herself, under obedience, to the foreign missions, he was very much averse to her leaving Mother Barat at a time when she seemed so necessary in the Paris convent. Father Perreau, who was acting as ecclesiastical superior of the order in the name of Cardinal Tallyrand-Perigord, considered that the interests of the Society required Mother Duchesne nearer home. Yielding to the opinion of her chief advisers, the Mother General had decided to postpone the departure of her missionaries.

On May 16 the Bishop came to pay a last call at the *Sacré-Coeur*. He was a keenly sensitive man who knew how to use to advantage both the gifts and the defects of his temperament. That Friday afternoon he was sad, disappointed, displeased. He had set his heart on the project; and as he walked slowly toward the outer door with Mother Barat, he made little effort to conceal the chagrin which opposition always aroused in him. Suddenly from a doorway Mother Duchesne appeared. She knew what was happening and could no longer restrain her pent-up ardor and anxiety. Now she was kneeling with clasped hands on the threshold the Bishop was about to cross and pleading with the Mother General: "Your consent, Mother! Give your consent." A moment of silent prayer in three dedicated hearts, then St. Madeleine Sophie spoke with all the deep affection she felt for this, her "eldest daughter," – "Yes, my dear Philippine, I consent, and I shall begin at once to look for companions for you."

Philippine Duchesne by Louise Callan RSCJ page 194-195